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## Bees in the Night

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## Bees in the Night

Andrew heard the doorbell at 1:15 a.m. He had been lying awake for two hours. He prayed it wasn't the police. In their old neighborhood, late-night visits from patrol officers had been a common occurrence. A small gang of teenage boys, although never officially charged, were the implicit culprits behind the three eggings of their front door and the spray painted "FAG" on their mailbox. The police offered little support, so Andrew finally convinced Paul to move to a gated subdivision, although tonight's disruption suggested that a security guard and twelve foot fence might not have been enough to keep out the crazies. After finding his slippers, Andrew reached for his glasses and left the room, leaving Paul sound asleep on the far side of the bed.

The kitchen light pierced his dilated pupils. Andrew walked nervously towards the front door and flipped on the porch light, half-expecting to see a face jump out at him as he pressed his eye to the peephole. Nobody was there. He opened the door and stepped outside, shielding himself from the expected egg to the face. Not only was the yard deserted, but the street and driveways were vacant as well. The entire neighborhood slept under the watchful eyes of ADT and Brink Home Security Systems.

Convinced that he must have imagined the noise, Andrew decided to try a glass of warm milk to help him fall sleep. He opened the refrigerator and pushed aside several varieties of V8 Fusion, but found no milk on the shelf. Disappointed, he closed the door and added to the grocery list clipped to the stainless steel. Next to the list was a Prudential Financial calendar. Paul was meticulous about crossing out each day as he waited for his morning coffee to brew. Technically it's already Wednesday, Andrew thought, as he took the blue pen and made an X through Tuesday's square. Before he went back to bed, he filled Stevie Nicks's dog bowl.

Normally he fed her in the morning, but he planned to hit the snooze button a few extra times. He placed the bowl next to the kitchen door and trudged upstairs.

The clock glared at him: 2:35 a.m. Andrew hadn't slept a wink since he returned to bed an hour ago. Paul snored quietly. A streak of his black skin glowed blue under the sliver of light that snuck through the window curtains. A thin line of drool trickled from the corner of his mouth and onto the pillow. Andrew gently traced Paul's eyebrows with his finger.

Not wanting to turn on his reading light, Andrew pulled on a t-shirt and once again walked downstairs, this time to watch some TV. He thought a light snack might help end the insomnia, so he turned to go into the kitchen, tripping over Stevie Nicks's empty bowl in the process. He found nothing appetizing in the pantry or the cupboards. While shuffling through the top shelf of the fridge, he found a half- full carton of milk behind the pomegranate-blueberry juice. Confused about how he had missed it before, he poured himself a glass and sat in the leather recliner. It took him a moment to find the satellite remote, but he was soon watching a National Geographic special about migrating whales.

It was 4:27 a.m. Andrew was disoriented and exhausted. He was back in bed, although he didn't remember turning the TV off or walking upstairs. He pulled the sheet up over his bare chest, his entire body aching for sleep. Stevie Nicks slept beneath the window, her front paw twitching at random intervals. The antique cherry armoire he and Paul had spent four days refurbishing loomed in the corner. Paul's clothes, ironed the night before, hung from a hook on the front door.

A rattling sound disrupted Andrew's thoughts. He strained his neck towards the open bedroom door. The noise was coming from downstairs. It sounded like a doorknob. Andrew bolted

upright, suddenly feeling wide awake. Someone was breaking in. He couldn't remember if he had programmed the security alarm before going to bed.

"Paul?" He whispered. "Paul, are you awake?" Paul's breathing remained steady.

Andrew threw off the covers and marched out of the room. As he tiptoed down the stairs, he grabbed one of the soapstone sculptures from the table on the landing. While positioning the object for maximum damage he heard the front door creak open. Someone was in the living room, probably ogling the new flat screen. Andrew struggled to contain his mounting anger. He could feel the presence of the intruder on his skin and it sickened him.

Andrew neared the living room without turning on the light. He wanted to catch the perpetrator by surprise. He wanted to smash the soapstone against his skull. Rounding the corner, he saw the outline of the man next to the couch. Paul's iPod dock was on the adjacent end table. The man wasn't moving.

With gritted teeth Andrew pounced. He swung the "Mother and Child" carving directly at the man's head. There was a loud crack. The corner lamp fell to the floor. For a moment, Andrew was too stunned to move. He stared at the soapstone clutched in his hand, wondering if it was now a murder weapon.

In Andrew's brief moment of suspended animation, the intruder managed to stumble out the front door. Andrew followed, but by the time he reached the porch, the man was gone. Still shaking, Andrew closed the door, double checking each lock, reset the alarm system, and picked up the broken lamp. He knew he should call the police, but after so many unproductive meetings, he and

Paul were wary of involving law enforcement. He returned the soapstone to the table and climbed the stairs, hoping his heart rate and breathing would return to normal by the time he crawled into bed.

“What were you doing down there?” Paul mumbled. Andrew slid beneath the covers.

“I just knocked something over. Sorry I woke you. Go back to sleep.” Paul groaned and turned onto his side. Within seconds, he was snoring again.

Andrew wasn’t sure how long he had been staring at the ceiling. His eyes burned and his head pounded. The clock now flashed 6:07 a.m. Paul’s alarm would go off soon. Why couldn’t he fall asleep? Something about the room unsettled him. It smelled different, almost like sweat. Too frustrated to really care, he sighed and returned to staring at the ceiling. After a few more agonizing minutes, Andrew resigned himself to counting sheep. He closed his eyes and imagined a white picket fence in a grassy field. One, two, three, four... When he reached 150 the sheep started to turn neon colors. At 211 they grew blowholes. By 267 they sprouted wings. Sheep number 298 buzzed over the fence. Wait a minute, Andrew stopped himself, sheep don’t buzz.

He popped open his eyes and realized that it wasn’t the sheep buzzing, but several bees whizzing around the room. In horror, Andrew looked towards the open window and saw a stream of them flying in. He panicked when he noticed the bees heading straight for Paul. He had to stop them; Paul was deathly allergic. But there were so many of them. A buzzing cloud filled the room.

“Paul!” Andrew screamed. “Paul get out of here. They’re coming for you!” Paul murmured something, but didn’t wake. Andrew reached over and began shaking him by the shoulders.

“Wake up! They’re going to kill you.” Paul nearly fell out of bed.

“Hurry, go downstairs. I’ll close the door behind you.” Paul rubbed his

eyes and stared at his husband.

“What’s going on?” He asked groggily.

“The bees, they’re all over you. You have to get out of here. The bees!” Andrew attempted to shoo Paul out of the room, swatting at the insects all the while.

“What are you talking about? There’s nothing here.” Andrew was growing hysterical. Why wouldn’t Paul listen to him? Did he want to die again? A bee darted past his ear, aimed straight for Paul’s face. Andrew tried to brush it away, slapping Paul’s cheek in the process.

“What’s wrong with you?” Paul yelled and backed away. Andrew squeezed his head between his hands and strained to think of a solution.

“Wait here!” Andrew sprinted from the room and bounded down the stairs three at a time. With growing concern, Paul followed. Andrew was ready when Paul walked into the kitchen. He took one look at the swarm of bees crawling on Paul’s arms and chest and knew he had to act. He pulled the pin on the fire extinguisher and sprayed Paul from head to toe. Paul screamed and frantically began searching for his cell phone.

“I’m calling 911!” He bellowed through the thick cloud of sodium bicarbonate. Andrew abruptly paused in his assault. That’s it, he thought, we need a doctor.

“Yes, call Doctor Greenberg. Tell him it’s an emergency. We’ll meet him at the clinic.” Andrew dropped the extinguisher and flew around the room looking for his shoes and car keys. He could hear Paul speaking to the doctor.

“Okay, let’s go,” Andrew said when Paul lowered the phone from his ear.

“We’re not going anywhere,” Paul hesitated. “You need to sit down, Andrew. The ambulance will be here soon.”

“Not the ambulance! They won’t know what to do. We need Doctor Greenberg. He’ll know. And we have to go now, before the bees return. The extinguisher is empty. We can’t hold them back anymore. They’re angry now. They’re going to return, and this time the queen will be with them. She’ll sting you, and you’ll go into anaphylactic shock, and I don’t have an EpiPen, but Doctor Greenberg will have one. We need to see Doctor Greenberg.” Andrew ranted with seizure-like hand motions. Paul mumbled something into the phone and then, as calmly as possible, he said, “We can’t see Doctor Greenberg today.”

“No, no, no.” Andrew nearly tripped over the ottoman.

“Andrew, listen to me. It’s Saturday; Doctor Greenberg won’t be in his office. If you want me to be safe, we need to wait for the ambulance.” Andrew halted and looked confused. Paul worried he had misspoken.

“But it’s Wednesday,” Andrew gasped. He tore the kitchen calendar from the fridge. The blue X’s blurred together as he counted the days.

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